

Adjournment Debate

for a full assessment of humanitarian and compassionate considerations.

Therefore, the problem has been resolved. The backlog clearance system is continuing to operate.

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NEW HORIZONS PROGRAM

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, I am rising concerning the question of the New Horizons program, a program for seniors in Canada which has obtained a very significant recognition by seniors' groups as a worth-while and innovative program whereby funds are made available to seniors and seniors' organizations to fund newsletters, publications, facilities that are being constructed, and so on.

• (1820)

The comments I have received about this program for many years always have been positive. Certainly, since I became a member of Parliament and became even more aware of their existence, seniors' organizations in my riding and elsewhere in Canada have praised this as a very worth-while effort.

The budget for the program is modest. I believe the figure for this year is only \$15 million. The Minister of State for Seniors is very fond of pointing out in her answers to questions on the subject that that program has been maintained. In fact, if you bear inflation in mind, it has been whittled down, but I will leave that aside. I congratulate the government for not having reduced the expenditure. It cut almost everything else, but it has not cut this one. I am delighted that that is so.

What it has done is in a way worse. Four million dollars out of the \$15 million has been frozen at the present time while the government undertakes a review of the effectiveness of the program. Every seniors group says the program is great, but the government still feels that after a few years in service it has to be reviewed in case it is not effective. So it is holding back \$4 million. I do not know whether the \$4 million is to pay for the firm that is going to do the review for the government, whether the government is doing an internal review or what. I do not have any details on that. I do not understand why the \$4 million has to be frozen.

So I asked about this on June 1. I put a question in the House during Question Period. The Minister of State for Housing was not here, neither was the Minister of National Health and Welfare or the President of the Treasury Board so, in the circumstances, I directed the question to the Acting Minister of Finance. However, he did not answer. I got an answer from the Minister of State (Youth), Minister of State (Fitness and Amateur Sport) and Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

This very distinguished and capable minister appeared not to have grasped the facts in relation to the seniors program. Given his youth, his enthusiasm for fitness and amateur sports and his heavy duties as deputy leader of the government in the House, I was not entirely surprised. He suggested that there had been no change and that the money was flowing the way it normally did.

Some of us knew otherwise. Certainly seniors groups have experienced other answers than that. I was a bit surprised at the answer so I returned to the issue on Wednesday, June 6. By that time the Minister of State for Seniors had reappeared. However, I got exceedingly vague answers from her on this. She would not admit that there was a freeze although in fact she had done so in committee. I quoted from the committee proceedings of a few weeks before. It was all pretty vague.

It appears that, in spite of my questions, I was not getting any answers as to what was being done with this \$4 million. I asked on June 1 and I asked again today. I hope that the parliamentary secretary, who I know is sitting here anxiously with a prepared answer which is probably full of facts, figures and everything else, is going to tell me everything I want to know.

But the question I asked then was:

Will the minister tell us when the review will be completed? When will the frozen funds be released? When will the review's findings be made public, or will they be made public?

They are all quite simple questions, but not one of them was answered by the minister on either June 1, when I first asked the question, or on June 6, when the Minister of State for Seniors as here.

On June 1, I got an answer that was incorrect. On June 6, I got an evasive, fumbling answer that simply said what a great program it was. I agree. I do not see a need for review. I do not know why the funds need to be frozen. The funds are frozen in different amounts in different provinces. In some provinces there is no freeze on their allocation. In other provinces there is a freeze on 25 per